

This issue of

THE  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
QUARTERLY

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THE  
VENTURA COUNTY  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
QUARTERLY



VOL. 31, NO. 4

SUMMER 1986

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The *Quarterly* is published from the Society's headquarters at 100 East Main Street, Ventura, California 93001. The Society assumes no responsibility for statements or opinions expressed by the authors of the articles.

Memberships in the Society are available for families and individuals (\$25), (students \$5), businesses (\$100). Life memberships are offered for \$500.

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# THE

# VENTURA COUNTY

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Cover illustration by Leslie Clark from a photograph by Helen Caire. Pictured is a vaquero aboard the schooner *Santa Cruz* bound for Santa Cruz Island.

Map of Santa Cruz Island by Joan Word.

Photographs from the collections of Helen Caire and Carey Stanton.

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## ISLAND ROUNDUPS AND SHEARING

by Helen Caire

### PART ONE: ROUNDUPS

*Santa Cruz Island lies about twenty-five miles due south of Santa Barbara. It is one of the links in the chain of four islands which, where the California coast takes an east-west swing, form the Santa Barbara Channel. Justinian Caire, in his development of the Island ranch, added vineyards and cattle to the formerly-introduced sheep as the main ranching operations. Consequently, the busiest seasons were the vintage and the cattle and sheep roundups. With regard to the latter, my father, Frederic Caire, noted:*

*a goodly number of men—riders and shearers—were brought from the mainland for a period of forty to fifty days. In early days as many as 40 to 50,000 sheep roamed the island; later the number was regulated to accord with the natural conditions determined by rainfall and feed reserves.*

*In early days there were two shearing seasons—spring and fall, but with the reduction in the number of sheep only one in spring was necessary. Because of the nature of the terrain, the roundups and trasquila (as the shearing was referred to at the Island) remained much the same for over half a century. Other ways were tried but were never successful. These attempts, which will be mentioned later in this account, provided a good laugh for the oldtimers. Most of what follows was written at the Island during the last roundup.*

The vaqueros in the Santa Barbara region, called Barbareños, are recruited on the mainland for ranch work on Santa Cruz as well as on the three other islands on which there are sheep operations: San Miguel, San Clemente, and San Nicolas. Of course, they are also recruited for cattle operations on Santa Cruz Island and on the mainland. After roundup, some continue work on the ranches breaking horses, riding fence, checking water holes for cattle, etc. But most of the vaqueros find other jobs during slack season.

From Santa Barbara, crossing the channel in the Santa Cruz Island Company schooner *Santa Cruz*, the vaqueros arrive at Prisoners' Harbor, the main port of the Island. Up the three-mile canyon bed road of the Cañada del Puerto by truck (in olden days by horse-drawn wagons), they alight at the Main Ranch in the Cañada del Medio, the central valley.

After stowing their gear in one of the bunkhouses, they cross the vast barnyard

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: The parents of Helen Caire, although both born in San Francisco, established their home in Oakland after their marriage. Helen was born and raised in Oakland, attending Holy Name College (present site of the Kaiser Center) for grammar and high school. After attending University of California at Berkeley, Helen further expanded her education with extensive travel: Europe; Canada; Mexico; Guatemala; the South Seas, Tahiti and other Society Islands, Marquesas and Tuamotu—but it was at Santa Cruz Island that Miss Caire spent "every summer since before I can remember—happy days!" Miss Caire's first contribution to *The Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly*, "A Brief History of Santa Cruz Island from 1869 to 1937," appeared in the Summer of 1982. Miss Caire's other publications include:

"Christmas at Santa Cruz Island," *Noticias*, Winter, 1983;

"The Last Vaqueros," *The Californians*, Volume 4, Number 5;  
and *Señor Castillo, Cock of the Island*.



*Lineup of Vaqueros Before Roundup, Main Ranch and Barnyard. To the left is the shearing shed.*

to the red brick stable where horses, saddles, and bridles are assigned. Spurs, *reatas*, *chirrión* (braided rawhide quirt), and knife are each man's personal concern. Now the chorus of crickets and frogs take over; then the night is still.

Very early the next morning, the bell on the knoll behind the kitchen rings mercilessly—before the birds have begun their chorus of matins in the pepper trees, even before the white dawn. Often it is in pitch darkness that the vaqueros start their day. After breakfast in the long mess hall they set out, catching their horses and saddling up. More than likely there are several mad dashes across the barnyard, the younger horses skittish at this early hour. Amid laughter from those on quieter mounts and cries of “*Bueno! Stay with him!*” a short wild west show breaks out.

The bucking is soon checked; in the semi-obscurity the vaqueros trot up to form a circle around the *mayordomo* who gives them their posts for the roundup. He points east, west, north or south in his explanations. Few instructions are needed as the vaqueros are old hands and usually take the same posts every year.

Each roundup, called *corrida* in Islandese, covers some section of the territory being run, such as the Pinos Chicos (a hard one) and Pinos Grandes (a long, rough one) both on the northwestern coast; Potrero Norte (rolling hills, easy country); Punta del Oeste (to the westernmost point, a very long trek that starts from Christy Ranch); Coches Prietos (on the southern coast) as well as many others.

Now hoofbeats sound on the still air as the riders start out. Beyond the barnyard they separate to take the roads east or westward; after a distance they follow the

trails in the northern or southern ranges between which the Cañada del Medio is cradled. Here and there a man begins to drop off to reach his appointed place.

Lead man has one of the hardest jobs, as his is the farthest outpost of the territory being covered. The roundup begins when he starts. The vaqueros in the near vicinity, hearing his shout, close in gradually. The canyons and hills echo and resound with whoops, cries, and cracks of *chirriónes*. “Hoop-ah! Hoop-ah!” The *mayordomo* is here and there to see that all goes well, urging, commanding.

The horses, too, know the game. Sturdy-legged, broad-chested, with the hoofs of goats, energy and stamina from mustang blood—these are the horses that work on the annual roundups at the Island. Without the horses’ “savvy” in such rugged country, the roundups would be impossible. They follow the sheep, watching their movements, and gallop in to cut off their breaking. The tough, accustomed hoofs can follow the sheep almost everywhere. At certain strategic points a *punta manga* (wing fence) helps the vaqueros and horses to head the sheep in the right direction especially toward the last stretch of the run. Sometimes, of course, a few sheep will break and get by a horse and rider. Then there must be swift backtracking to round them up again.

Hour upon hour the pursuit and driving continue—up one *cañada* and down another, across one ridge to a farther one. More and more sheep join the band, the semicircle of vaqueros behind them always increasing and closing in. The ranges, usually lying in a great spell of silence, echo and re-echo with the voices of men, the thud of horses’ hoofs, cracks of *chirriónes*, the bleating of rushing sheep—the sun has long ago risen and climbed high in the sky, but the work goes on. The



*Lineup of Vaqueros Before Roundup, Christy Ranch.*

The riders keep following till all the bands of sheep are united, the semicircle of horsemen close behind.

The sheep are driven toward a *punta manga* which leads into fields not far from the Main Ranch, or from Christy where the roundups and shearing also take place. The rest stop may be in the hanging valley of Portezuela where the sheep are herded into the Descanso field. There hang the silver skeletons of fiddlenecks, their gold long-since spent. Men, horses and sheep rest for an hour or so before the final drive into the Main Ranch, or Christy and the corrals near the shearing shed there.

During this pause in the *corrida*, if you want to hear an oldtimer chuckle, ask him if he ever saw a buck running around the Island hills with white sails on his horns. You'll hear this story: One year the Santa Cruz Island Company, though skeptical as to results, allowed a different mode of rounding up the sheep. A number of skilled and experienced sheepherders and their dogs were included with the vaqueros at the start of the *corridas*. The herders were excellent sheepmen on their smooth or gently rolling land with flocks accustomed to their methods, but at the Island . . .

Alas for Little Bo-Peep! The dogs returned to the Main Ranch footsore, paws pricked with cactus spines. Improvised little leather shoes failed to help them. Worse yet, the sheep failed to shy clear of the four-foot-high white cloth strips nailed to the fence on both sides of the home stretch. (This novel spectacle was intended to encourage the animals to continue in the right direction.) Thus arose the hilarious legends of rams roaming the Island hills with white streamers waving. It was enough to make the oldtimers laugh until they rolled off their saddles. Thereafter, the usual ways of sheep roundups were reinstated. On the rugged Island terrain this method proved the best.

But now it is time to return to our muttons, deserted at their resting place. If it is near enough to the Main Ranch, Hercules Pico, cook, has driven out to leave provisions: bread, onions, *frijoles*, coffee. Having unsaddled, the vaqueros prepare for a meal. A few men set about building a circular fireplace with large creek rocks. Some gather firewood. Others whittle points on slim branches or reach up for the barbecue sticks of the previous year, stuck across boughs of great oaks shading the barbecue area. A few vaqueros are roping a lamb or two for the feast. The lazy ones are lying on their backs or pretending to be busy about a saddle or a sore finger. But there is no bickering. In the main, the work is taken on good-naturedly by the energetic men.

The lambs are quickly dispatched, drawn and skinned with the hunting knife, which is stuck in the belt and used for many things. Without it the vaquero would



*Carne Asada Barbecue, Sur-Cañada Pomona.*

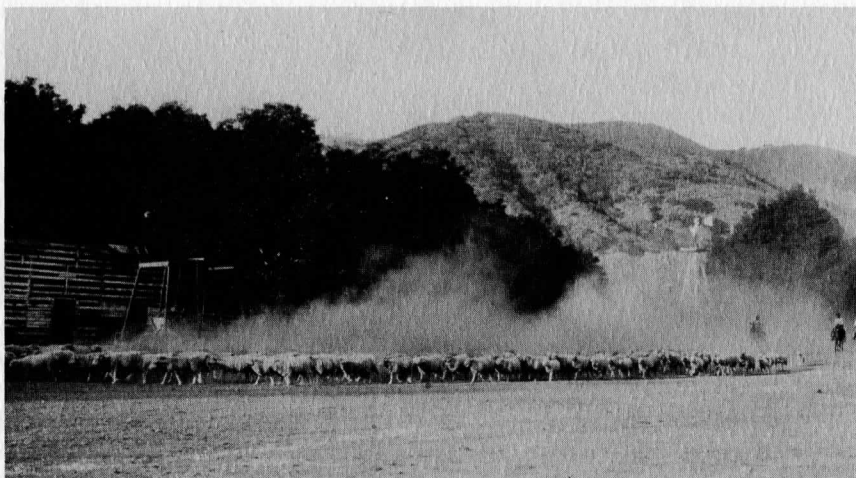
be almost lost. How else could he slice his bread or cut a leather thong from the saddle if necessary, or clean his nails?

The meat is cut up and spitted on the barbecue poles. If a young wild pig happens to be caught not far from the resting place, he becomes part of the menu. Soon arises the peculiarly savory odor of *carne asada* cooked outdoors, an irresistible scent to a hungry group that has worked hard, so usually the meat is eaten underdone. The fat sizzles down on the hot coals which sputter and flame up.

After the meat is cooked, a vaquero with a delicate palate places a lamb's head whole into the glowing coals. When he considers his prize well-done, he lifts it out with sticks, cleaves it open, and shares the well-roasted brains with other gourmets. Thick slices of Pico's good bread are toasted, spread with the finest fat—which any vaquero will tell you is as good as butter—then topped with hearty onion rings.

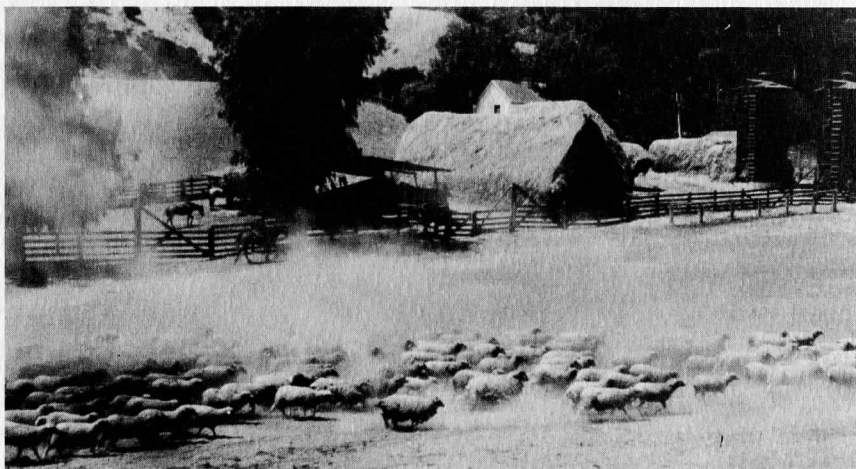
Talk is rather general, broken by laughter at the remarks or antics of a comedian or two. Mingled with the aroma of cooking meat are the scents of boiling coffee and of hand-rolled cigarettes. After the barbecue, there is time for a *siesta* on the generous leafy mattresses cushioning the earth, with a saddle for a pillow.

Then the vaqueros are back in the saddle again for the few miles of the home stretch. As they near the Main Ranch, a vanguard of two or three rides ahead to open gates, close others, and take various posts so that the sheep will be headed toward the corrals near the shearing shed at the western end of the barnyard. (In olden times a few tame goats were kept, usually at Prisoners' Harbor; there never were wild goats on the Island. They were trained so that during roundups one would lead the sheep across the barnyard to the corrals. This method was eventually discontinued, however, and the goats dispatched.)



*Coming Into the Main Ranch.*

When the last band of sheep is crossing the barnyard, through clouds of dust, the riders appear a short distance behind them. There are husky bleats and occasional whoops to urge on the laggards, and some snapping of *chirriões*. Though the lambing season is over, there are some late lambs; one or two vaqueros are carrying the tired, hungry latecomers before them on their saddles. A few men dismount and urge onward the older stragglers. (When we are at the Island during the *corridas*, we make pets of the *lepes* (orphans), bottle-feeding them.)



*End of the Roundup. The sheep are being driven across the barnyard to the shearing shed.*

At length the heavy gates close on the hindmost sheep. Plaintive bleating and milling continue for a while. The dust settles in the great barnyard as the men unsaddle, wash up, and rest or sharpen their shears for the morrow's shearing. The first bell on the knoll behind the kitchen starts ringing. The men stroll toward the whitewashed stone mess hall and line up along a railing till the dinner bell rings. Tomorrow the shearing shed will be the center of activity.

## PART II—ISLAND SHEARING

*Departure of the vaqueros for the Island roundups and shearing provided the opportunity for a gala occasion. I am picturing one of these farewell events from my memory of my father's amused recounting of those happenings, going back to the time of his father, Justinian Caire.*

It is a windless day in spring. The Santa Barbara Harbor lies smooth as glass. Green water laps almost noiselessly around the horny red barnacles of the wharf piles. Above, the broad planks of the wharf resound with merrymaking. While the vaqueros wait for wind to swell the canvas of the *Star of Freedom*, or, some years later, for the schooner *Santa Cruz* (built in 1894), to get under way, they waste no spleen with fevered impatience and frustration at delay.

With light hearts they enjoy the time with their wives, mothers, sweethearts and children. Several have their guitars. Honored among them are those who have the gift of the troubadour—the poet-musicians. One makes a circle of the ladies, saluting each with a bow and doffing his hat with a flourish before beginning. Then strumming his guitar, he improvises complimentary songs suitable to each. There is a round of applause, an eager flashing of black eyes as the audience congratulates the vaquero.

*November 12, 1884*

*The schooner Santa Rosa arrived in our harbor yesterday from Santa Cruz Island with 100 head of fine sheep on board consigned to I. K. Fisher. ("In Old Santa Barbara," compiled by Stella Rouse. Santa Barbara News-Press.)*

The group passes the time happily dancing on the rough wharf planks, singing plaintive, sentimental old songs, laughing at jokes and yarns, chatting and gossiping. At last the breeze comes up, announcing the wind that will blow the groups of leave-takers apart, or, in later days, the engine of the *Santa Cruz* starts, announcing she will soon be weighing anchor.

At this point, more often than not, my grandfather (later my father or his brother Arthur) is accosted by a vaquero, announcing that Angel or some other *compadre* is not here.

"But where is Angel? He was here a while ago."

"Si, Don Justiniano," comes the answer. "*¿Que sea in dificultades?*"—Might he be in difficulties?

From long experience my grandfather knows that this sudden news, so delicately put in Californio-Spanish, could mean only one thing. With a word to the other vaqueros that they should prepare to leave soon and that they are not to stray back to town, he hurries down the wharf to the little old city jail.

There, sure enough, is Angel—unangelically and blissfully bleary-eyed. Then Justinian Caire hurries to the court with a word to the judge. Angel is brought to court. The wise judge knows that the vaquero will be in a much safer and healthier climate and earning an honest living to boot on the Island ranch. Thus, after hearing the plea of guilty, he pronounces sentence, then suspends it. He urges the erring Angel to see that he does not over-imbibe in the future and further orders him to leave at once for the Island. The vaquero, chastened though still rather incoherent, meekly agrees; much to his satisfaction when he sobers up, he finds himself on shipboard somewhere on the Santa Barbara Channel, on his way to the Main Ranch.

The shearing shed is humming with life. Between seasons the large building is silent. But now the *trasquila* (the shearing in Islandese) is on in full force. The snip, snip, snip of shears is heard hour after hour. There is the tap, tap, tap of the sheep as they are pulled on three legs out of the corral, the thud as they are jerked over



Shearing Shed and Covered Corral. The weighing and packing portion of the shed is to the right of the picture.

on their backs, the bleating of sheep in the pens, the shuffling of feet as the vaqueros bring up each fleece and get the *fichas* in return, snatches of song, little talk.

A great number of sheep brought in on each roundup are driven into the huge roofed corral directly in front of the shearing shed. From there, some sheep are herded into a long runway all along the length of the shearing area. When it is filled to the end, heavy gates on rollers are closed, separating the runway into small pens. Except for fencing, this side of the shearing shed is unwallled. A narrow gate from each pen opens into the shearing area. While the *trasquila* is on, most of the activity takes place in this section of the long double building. After all the sheep in the pens are shorn, the gates are rolled back. The sheep are driven out into an immense corral and another band is driven into the runway.

When all the sheep are shorn, they are separated: those for market are turned into certain fields to be trucked down to Prisoners' Harbor and shipped to the mainland aboard the schooner *Santa Cruz*, which crosses the channel frequently during this season. The rest are driven back to their territory, the number in each section being determined by the nature of the terrain and the amount of feed available.

During the shearing, the *mayordomo* perches himself in the high seat built in the narrow space joining the two sections of the shearing shed. Across his knees is a wooden shelf with a number of slits in its broad surface. Into them he slips small metal disks or *fichas*, about the size of a penny, stamped with a cross for Santa Cruz on one side, with the company's initials, "S.C.I.Co," on the other. Passing from hand to hand for over sixty years, the *fichas* are worn thin.

January 13, 1910

*The Santa Cruz Island schooner, Captain George Nidever<sup>1</sup>, came in from the island yesterday with a cargo of 13,000 pounds of the fall wool clip. A cargo brought in Tuesday amounted to 25,000 pounds. Captain Nidever stated that there were several cargoes yet to be brought over. The fall clip is the smaller one of the year and the spring shearing is expected to double the present output. Owing to the heavy early rains, the spring clip will be in a much cleaner condition. ("In Old Santa Barbara," compiled by Stella Rouse. Santa Barbara News-Press).*

When a vaquero has shorn a sheep, he wraps the fleece into a bundle, tosses it on one of the broad shelves flanking both sides of the seat, and takes a *ficha* to keep tabs on the number of sheep he has shorn. At the end of each day's *trasquila*, the vaqueros form a long queue in the office. The *fichas* of each are taken and recorded to his account. In addition to his wages, the vaquero's record of *fichas* adds to his pay. (A thousand years from now, if some anthropologist should dig up one of these tokens, I wonder what he would call it.)

The vaquero then makes his way among the shearers to one of the whetting stones set on narrow shelves along the wall. He dips his shears into a small barrel of water on the floor beside each shelf. He rubs the blades on the stone, dips them occasionally into the water, and runs his fingers a bit away from the edge of the blades to test their sharpness. When he is satisfied, he chooses a sheep from a pen (a specified number of shearers draw sheep from each pen), and pulls it out by a hind leg. He bends to his work once more. Snip, snip, snip—the fleece falls away from the animal.

One may ask why the old method of shearing is still in use. A number of years ago, shearing machines were installed. The oldtimers tried them for a while, but in a short time went back to the shears. A speedy shearer can gather a very tidy number of *fichas* by the end of the day. Besides, these men must not only be professional shearers, but vaqueros as well, able to ride over rugged country while rounding up sheep.

Everyone is busy. Most of the vaqueros are bare-headed, and shocks of hair fall over their foreheads as they bend to their work. One vaquero keeps his hat glued to his head all day. Another knots the four corners of a red cotton bandanna and wears it snugly on his crown. He is rather old, but nimble and strong. At intervals he sings snatches of songs in a good baritone.

The ditty of ditties in this busy place, however, used to be sung by Nini Ayala who prided himself on being the oldest Island vaquero. He rode the Island ranges for more than sixty years. He might be looking over the pen for a sheep, sharpening his shears, or walking up to get his *ficha*—the old refrain was chanted over and over when he was in the mood:

*Ay, ay, ay!*  
*Y mas ay, ay!*  
*Parece que llueve,*  
*Es agua que cae . . .*

To translate roughly:

Oh, dear me!  
Many dear me's!  
It seems to be raining.  
It's water that falls.

This amusing, foolish sing-song went on and on. However, Nini never chose another. Nini's roundup and *trasquila* days are over now. The ancient beams of the shearing shed must surely miss that long repeated chant and the jaunty, humorous little old man who intoned it.

There is little talk during the shearing but once in a while there are brief verbal exchanges and sometimes a wager. A vaquero—let's call him Juan—has almost finished shearing a large sheep with a heavy fleece which lies like a soft rug on the stout planks of the floor. Someone—Ramón, perhaps—says, "I bet you that weighs almost twenty pounds, eh?"

"Bah," answers the perspiring Juan. "Thirty pounds."

A few nearby shearers pause to chip in with their views. At last Juan replies with finality, "Thirty. I bet you a cigar."

"Twenty," replies Ramón.

"Done!"

Juan, laughing, bundles up the fleece. Others exchange more opinions as the two vaqueros make their way past one of the broad shelves beside the *mayordomo's* high seat, but Juan does not toss his bundle on it. Followed by Ramón, he goes through a low gate into the second section of the building where the wool is sacked and weighed. The wool packer from his height near the beams of the ceiling, gives his views, and so does anyone else who happens to be nearby. After all, a fleece of thirty pounds is almost as fabulous as the Golden Fleece.

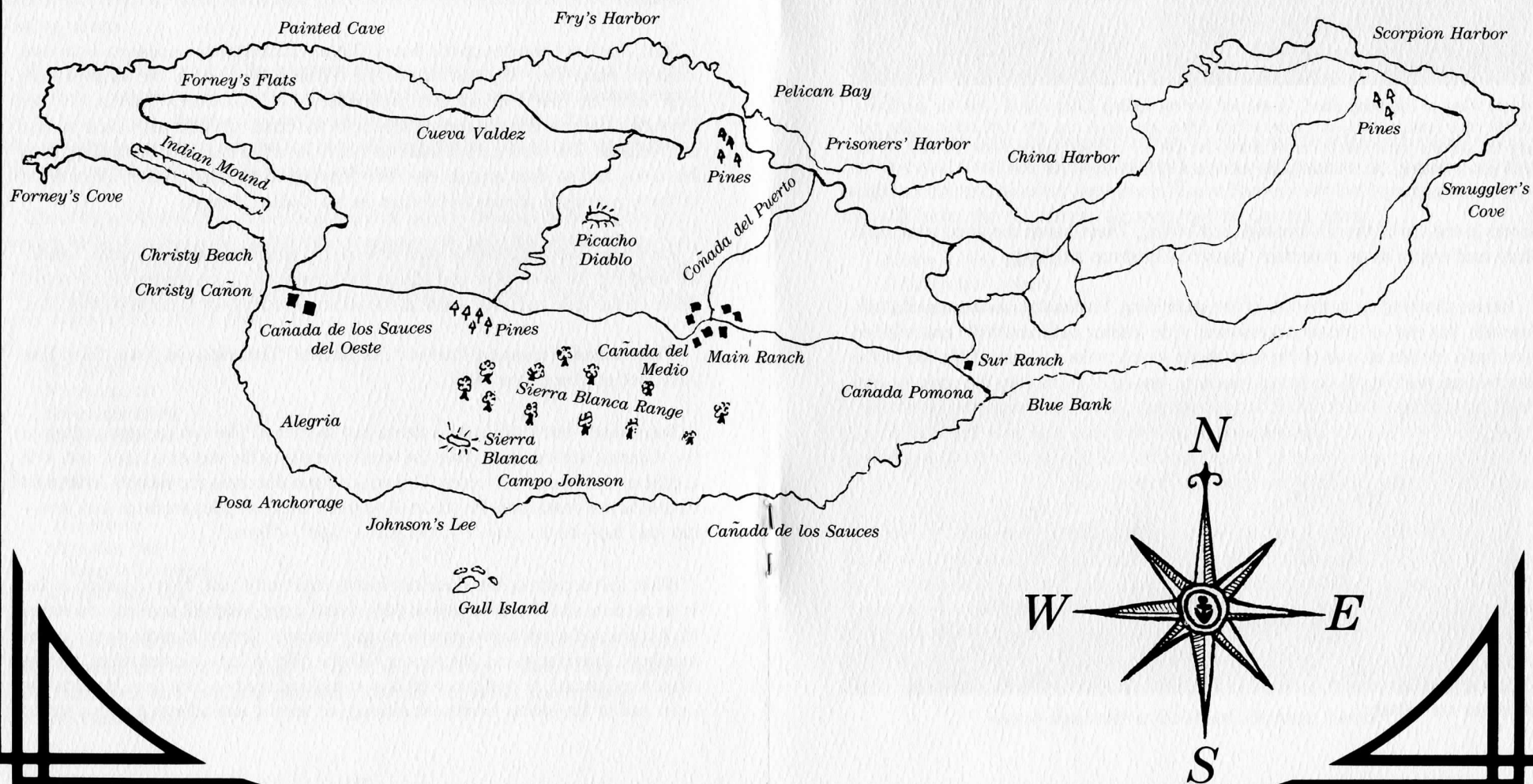
Ramón removes the three hundred or so pound weight marker on the scale balance for weighing the wool sacks and adjusts the lightest one. Juan throws the contested fleece on the scale and, with a wink at the packer up on his perch, keeps his foot on it.

"Forty pounds!" murmurs Ramón. "*¿Es posible?*" Then he looks down. "Hey! Take your foot off there, *hombre!*"

Twenty-five—but that's quite a fleece just the same! The two vaqueros return to the shearers' section. Juan gives the woolly bundle to the vaquero, Lugo, who, with a light cord, ties up the fleeces. The *mayordomo* discusses the weight. Juan picks up a *ficha* and resharpening his shears. And so the *trasquila* goes on: Snip, snip, snip—tap, tap, tap—ba-a-a, ba-a-a—"Bet you a cigar"—"Done!"

While this section of the shearing shed is constantly busy, there is action in the other section, also. Here the wool is packed into sacks, weighed, marked, and stored till it is trucked down to the warehouse at Prisoners' Harbor to await its trip to the mainland. Luis Hammond, the packer, with the help of Lugo has just rolled a heavy, filled sack toward its brothers and is now making ready a new one. He wets the open end of the burlap to prevent slippage or tearing and adjusts it with a strong

# Santa Cruz Island





*Inside View of Shearing Shed. To the left are the rolling gates which form the partitions. In the right center is the seat from which fichas are given out. On both sides of the seat are the shelves on which the wool is thrown. On the opposite sides of the shelves are the low gates leading into the weighing and packing portion of the shed.*

hoop to the top of the ten-foot-high scaffolding. There hangs the great wool sack, limp and empty as an expectant, gigantic Christmas stocking.

Before climbing up to the top of the scaffolding, Hammond, always wearing bib-overalls, has put on certain accessories: wide leather cuffs and belt, and a green eyeshade. He sits on one of the four planks which make a square at the top of the scaffolding, waiting till Lugo has tossed up enough fleeces into the sack for him to begin packing down the wool. Lugo is picking up the fleeces from the two shelves, tying them into bundles and throwing them into a wide stall near the scaffolding. When he has a good number, he tosses them upward. Fleece after fleece is gobbled up in the yawning mouth of the gradually bulging sack.

At intervals, Hammond seizes the rope hanging from a beam directly over the opening of the sack and disappears into the depths below to pack down the wool. Now and again he heaves himself up on the heavy rope and sits on one of the top boards, mopping his forehead with a dark blue bandanna while Lugo tosses more fleeces into the insatiable wool sack. Then down goes Hammond once more. He is like wood on rising water. At the start he is invisible. As he rises to the surface, first his head appears, then his shoulders, till, when the ravenous sack is filled, he emerges completely.

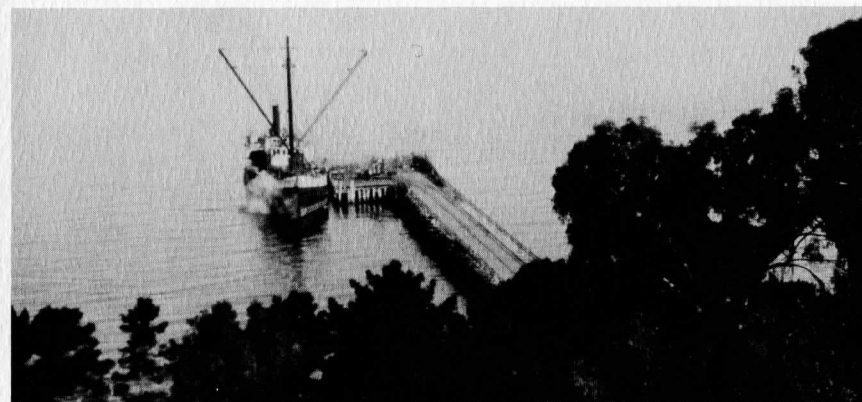
Having propped heavy boards against the sack with the help of Lugo, Hammond climbs again to loosen the hoop at the top. Then the men ease the sack down to lie lengthwise. With a curved giant's needle and heavy thread, Hammond begins sewing up the end of the sack, leaving small "ears" at each corner to facilitate handling. Now the men roll the sack to the scale. The weight is recorded and the sack rolled over to join others of its kind.

Hammond stencils in black paint the company initials: "S.C.I.Co." and the number of the sack on the rough burlap. He surveys his work and is pleased with the result. (In olden times the wool sacks were marked with red pigment found in Indian mounds. Centuries ago, the Island Chumash used it for coloring their designs.)

After the *trasquila* is over, the wool sacks will be hauled from the red brick warehouse at Prisoners' Harbor and trucked to the end of the wharf.<sup>2</sup> The wool will be shipped to the mainland by coastal steamer—the *Humboldt* or the *Celilo*.<sup>3</sup> The sheep, after being conveyed by truck to the wharf, will be shipped on the *Santa Cruz*. (In early days one of the small flock of imported Angora goats was trained to lead the sheep to the wharf.)

With the roundups and shearing all over, the vaqueros check in saddles and bridles. The shearing shed will be silent till next year's work begins. As the *Santa Cruz* weighs anchor and turns her prow toward Santa Barbara with the departing vaqueros, one still hears the old refrain, accompanied by Garcia's guitar:

*A Dios, a Dios, amores,  
A Dios, patria querida,  
A Dios, patria querida,  
Me voy a retirar...*



*Steamer Humboldt at the Wharf, Prisoners' Harbor.*

## NOTES

- 1 George Nidever, captain of the *Santa Cruz* at one time, was the son of George Nidever, well-known in the history of sea otter hunting around the island. *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever* (1802-1883), edited by Henry Ellison, University Press, Berkeley, California, 1937, is the interesting autobiography of this pioneer.
- 2 The shipping itself is well-described by my father in answer to an inquiry from the Santa Barbara *News-Press*:

In early years the island was stocked with sheep and cattle which were shipped to the mainland in the "Santa Cruz" or directly to San Francisco by coasting steamers, loaded at the island wharf at Prisoners' Harbor. In days before the Santa Barbara harbor had been developed, sheep cargoes were lightered ashore, while cattle were cast overboard to swim to land. After Los Angeles had established stockyards, livestock was shipped directly to Santa Barbara and from there trucked to Los Angeles, or shipped directly to the southern city by way of the port of San Pedro. Throughout the years, the wool was shipped the same way as the livestock, for ultimate delivery in Boston or Philadelphia, where its quality was well-known to buyers.
- 3 On the white facade of Spenger's, the well-known seafood restaurant in Berkeley, CELILO is clearly painted in black—part of the old vessel far from its moorings?

## HISTORICAL HIGHLIGHTS OF SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

by Marla Daily and Carey Stanton

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS:** Carey Stanton was born in Los Angeles in 1923, fourteen years before his parents bought the western nine-tenths of Santa Cruz Island. From that time to the present, Dr. Stanton's enjoyment of his island home has remained a constant in his life. In his words:

I had the unique experience of spending all my school vacations and as much other time as possible on our 55,000-acre island ranch. It was truly a wonderful place to grow up, a marvelously-preserved, 19th century working cattle ranch.

A graduate of Stanford University School of Medicine, I worked in internal medicine and pathology for about ten years and then, overtaken by good sense, I returned to Santa Cruz Island in 1957. The ranch records indicate that my return was on the tenth of April, twenty years to the day after my parents acquired the Island. It was, in retrospect, the wisest decision of my life.

Marla Daily began her work on Santa Cruz Island in 1973, just after completing her B. A. in Anthropology from the University of California at Santa Barbara. Today she divides her time and talent between field research on the island and the recording and analysis of these findings at Channel Islands Archives, Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History. Her projects include: researching the island's history and documenting and cataloging island artifacts, memorabilia, and ranch records which date back to the 1880s.

Santa Cruz Island is the largest (ninety-six square miles) of the four northern Channel Islands and is located twenty-five miles off the mainland coast of Santa Barbara. It is larger than Washington, D.C., and four times the size of the island of Manhattan! Its unique history and chain of ownership is an anomaly among California properties. Rather than the number of landowners increasing through land divisions with time, Santa Cruz Island remains owned by only two concerns and is relatively undeveloped by today's standards.

The first known inhabitants of Santa Cruz Island were the Chumash Indians and their ancestors. Radiocarbon dating shows that the island was inhabited at least as long ago as seven thousand years!<sup>1</sup> As the Chumash left no written record, information about their island cultures is primarily gathered through archaeological examination.

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, probably the first European explorer to reach the coast of California, wrote of the Santa Barbara Channel in his journals of 1542. His is the first written account known to include mention of the island, although he called it by a different name. Continuing through the next two and one half centuries, at least four explorers, including Cermeño in 1595, Vizcaino in 1602, Portolá in 1769, and Vancouver in 1795, charted and wrote of Santa Cruz Island. Portolá's expedition is credited with naming the island "Isla de Santa Cruz," and Vancouver's charts finalized the names of all the northern Channel Islands. These early European explorers were more concerned with the California mainland and tended to pay little attention to the islands. Some did stop for wood and water in passing.<sup>2</sup>

In 1769, Santa Cruz Island (along with all of California) became vested in the King of Spain. During Spain's ownership, Chumash Indians continued to live on the island although decreasing in numbers until, in 1822, the last of the Chumash left Santa Cruz Island to live on the mainland.<sup>3</sup> No Europeans are known to have settled on the island during the Spanish era, and presumably the island was "deserted" for many decades with perhaps the exception of a few seasonal fish camps scattered about the island's shores.

In 1821, after Mexico's long and successful revolt against Spain, California became part of the new Republic of Mexico. On July 20, 1838, the President of Mexico directed the Governor of California, Juan Bautista Alvarado, to grant lands to Mexican citizens who had performed various patriotic services. On May 22, 1839, Governor Alvarado conveyed the Island of Santa Cruz to Captain Andres Castillero. Specified in the



Rancho and Valley Santa Cruz Island, *Watercolor by James Madison Alden, 1855. The earliest known view of the Central Valley, the painting bears evidence of the existence of animal husbandry and agriculture at this date.*

grant was the island's description "... in extent of eleven square leagues and no more, and has for its boundaries the water's edge."<sup>4</sup> With this grant, Castillero became the first private owner of Santa Cruz Island, and he held that status for eighteen years (1839-1857).

Soon after California was admitted to statehood in 1850, the United States government appointed a Board of Land Commissioners to settle civil questions of California land ownership. Title to all land previously granted by the Spanish and Mexican governments during their rule in the newly formed State of California had to be proved by the owner before the Land Commission, according to United States law. In the case of Santa Cruz Island, on April 13, 1852, Andres Castillero filed his petition to secure confirmation of his title. His petition was repeatedly challenged and he was kept in court for twelve years. On November 7, 1864, the final necessary document was recorded by the United States Supreme Court, which confirmed Castillero's title as sole owner of Santa Cruz Island. In the meantime, however, Castillero had sold his interest in the island!

During the latter part of Castillero's ownership of Santa Cruz Island, Dr. James B. Shaw, an English physician residing in Santa Barbara, supervised the island. He is thought to have introduced to the island the French Merino sheep and perhaps the ancestors of the now feral pigs. During Shaw's management, the first known ranch house was built in the island's Central Valley in 1855.<sup>5</sup> After Castillero sold the island in 1857 to William Barron of Barron, Forbes & Company of San Francisco, Shaw continued to supervise the island for an additional twelve years.

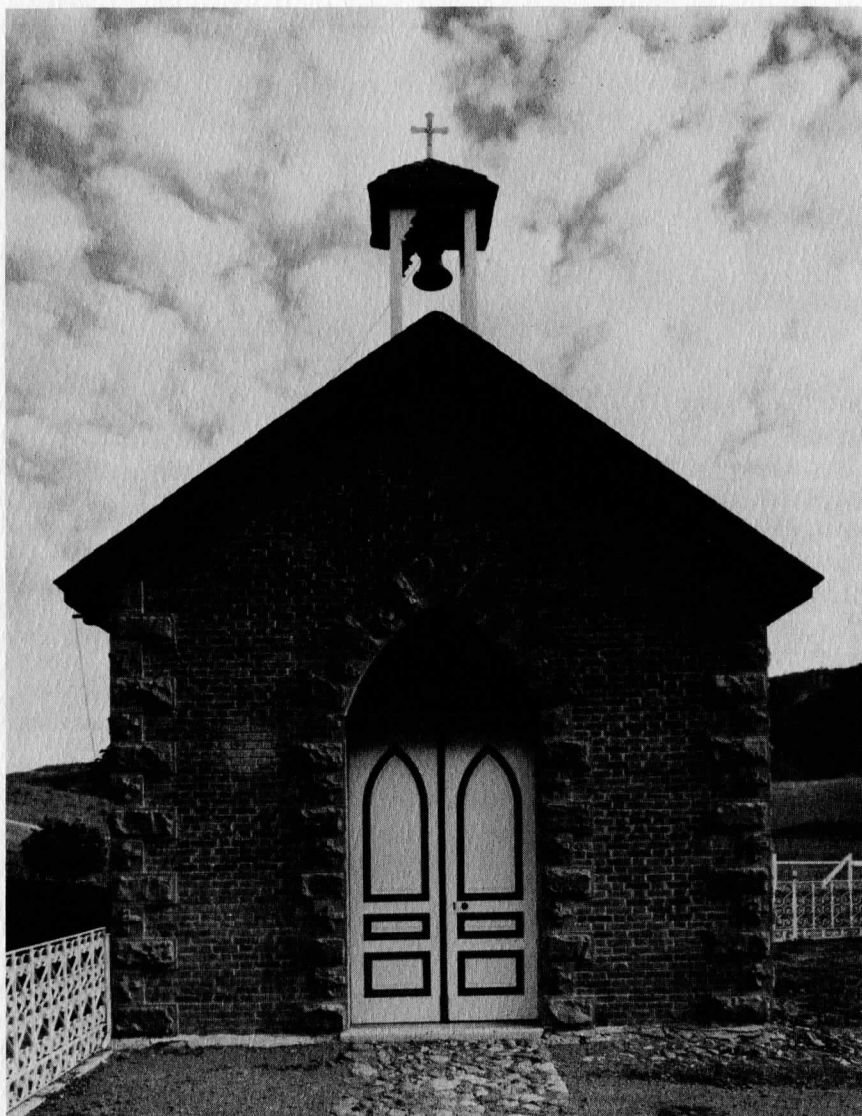
Barron owned the island for twelve years (1857-1869), until he sold it to ten San Franciscans, directors of a French savings bank, who formed a corporation called the Santa Cruz Island Company. This was the first time that the island had been owned by more than one person.

Before Barron's 1869 sale, very little had been done in the way of ranching development. Improvement began under the ownership of the Santa Cruz Island Company—its president and most active shareholder being a Frenchman from San Francisco named Justinian Caire. Within the course of twelve years, Caire bought out his nine partners in the corporation and became the sole owner of Santa Cruz Island by 1880. In that same year he paid his first visit to the island to survey his holdings and pursue the planning of what was to become one of the most prosperous, well-managed and beautiful ranches and vineyards in the entire state.

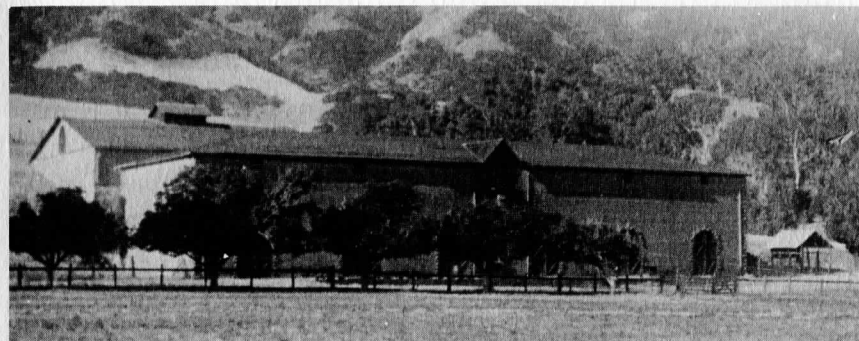
Under Caire's direction, the Santa Cruz Island Company developed a variety of agricultural and ranching endeavors. Buildings including ranch houses, bunk houses, barns, wineries, a chapel, mess hall, blacksmith shop and saddle shop were constructed. Wherever possible, native island materials were used. Kilns were built for the manufacture of bricks and limestone mortar. Stones were quarried and cut to shape on the island. A resident blacksmith forged wrought iron fittings, railings and hinges used on many of the buildings. Full-time employees included masons, a wagon maker, carpenters, painters, team drivers, dairymen, a butcher, vintners, grape-pickers, sheep-shearers, and a sea captain and sailors to run the Santa Cruz Island Company's sixty-foot schooner.



*Aerial View of Santa Cruz Island with Santa Rosa and San Miguel Islands in the Distance, 1964.*



*Chapel of the Holy Cross, Santa Cruz Island, 1964. The wrought-iron fencing surrounding the chapel, built in 1891, was handmade on the island.*



*Wineries, Santa Cruz Island, 1938. In 1950, the wineries were gutted by fire. Today the walls have been lowered and the buildings reroofed.*

The island was a very efficient operation and almost entirely a self-contained one. Flour, sugar and coffee were among the few staples which were required from the mainland. Temporary extra labor was brought to the island from Santa Barbara



*Pelican Bay, Santa Cruz Island, 1920s. Today just a few foundations and plantings remain as evidence of this resort run by Ira Eaton.*



*Prisoners' Harbor, Santa Cruz Island, 1964. Prisoners' Harbor remains the main point of entry for supplies and shipping of livestock.*

during sheep-shearing and grape-picking time. The wine which was made was shipped in bulk in kegs to San Francisco where it was bottled. (No known bottle of Santa Cruz wine exists today.) A vast number of acres of oat hay and alfalfa were cultivated to keep the draft horses fed. All of the work on the island's ninety-six square miles was done on horseback or with the aid of wagons. Justinian Caire's masterly plan for the island is unequaled.

In December, 1897, Justinian Caire died, having transferred all of the stock in the Santa Cruz island Company to his beloved wife, Albina.<sup>6</sup> Extensive litigation within the Caire family followed until, in 1925, the island was partitioned. The easterly 6,600 acres remained with the Caire descendants who were the dissenters in the family litigation, and the westerly 54,000 acres were offered for sale. This nine-tenths of Santa Cruz island remained on the market until 1937 when Edwin L. Stanton purchased it.

For the first two years of his ownership, Edwin Stanton tried to revive and improve the sheep business. It was a difficult task because the sheep had become accustomed to life in the wild and would not cooperate with roundup and shearing efforts. Emphasis was then switched to cattle, and polled Herefords were introduced. They remain the mainstay of the island's ranching operation today.

Edwin Stanton died in 1963 and management of the Santa Cruz Island Company passed to his son Carey. The island continues to be operated in much the same manner as a nineteenth century California ranch was. It offers a very special window into the past, with a twentieth century emphasis being placed on preservation and ecology. In the year 2008, the Santa Cruz Island Company holdings will pass to The Nature Conservancy, an organization dedicated to land preservation. The eastern tip of Santa Cruz Island, which remains in the ownership of Caire family descendants, is slated to become a part of our National Park System at an unknown future date.

## NOTES

This article was first printed in the Fall 1983 edition of *La Reata*, the quarterly publication of the Santa Barbara Corral of the Westerners, copyright retained by Marla Daily and Carey Stanton.

- 1 Glasgow, M.A., 1980. "Recent Developments in the Archaeology of the Channel Islands" in D. D. Power, ed., *The California Islands: Proceedings of a Multidisciplinary Symposium*. Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History, pp. 79-99. Glasgow lists 7140±210 radiocarbon year B.P. for a sample taken from Punta Arena, Santa Cruz Island.
- 2 Dana, Richard Henry, (1964). *Two Years Before the Mast*. Ward Ritchie Press, Los Angeles.
- 3 Johnson, John, 1982. "An Ethnohistoric Study of the Island Chumash." Unpublished Masters Thesis, University of California at Santa Barbara, p. 195. Johnson lists baptismal records of Chumash Indians from Santa Cruz Island in 1822.
- 4 March 21, 1897 (Patent Date). "Transcript of the Proceedings in Case No. 176. *Andres Castillero, Claimant, vs. The United States, Defendant*, for the Island of Santa Cruz."
- 5 Stenzel, Franz, 1975. *James Madison Alden, Yankee Artist on the Pacific Coast, 1854-1860*. Amon Carter Museum, Ft. Worth, Texas, page 50, plate 15, "Rancho and Valley Santa Cruz Island, California, 1855" watercolor 7" x 10 3/8". This is the earliest known view of Santa Cruz Island. It shows a man on horseback, some haystacks and fowl, establishing agriculture and animal husbandry on the island at least as early as 1855.
- 6 Caire, Helen, 1982. "A Brief History of Santa Cruz Island from 1869-1937" in *Ventura County Historical Society Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Summer 1982, pp. 1-33.